

Performing Songs from the Gruuthuse Manuscript

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Abstract:

The Gruuthuse Manuscript (NL-The Hague KB 79 K 10) originated in Bruges around 1400. In addition to poems and prayers, it contains 147 Dutch language songs. The melodies in stroke notation are notated separately from the texts and modern performers need to find their way through this labyrinth.

In our experimental exploration of the polyphonic potential of Gruuthuse-melodies from a central European perspective, we concluded that the songs by the Mönch von Salzburg and Oswald von Wolkenstein could be used as contemporary models for relating the text to the Gruuthuse-melodies. And that is just what Aventure did. In this paper I will explain how we did it, what was useful and what needs to be explored further.

Comparing the Gruuthuse-repertoire to the German songs is not new but there is no consensus to which extent similarities can be observed. In our ongoing artistic research project, Aventure applied the central European recipe for transforming monophonic songs into polyphonic instrumental ensemble-arrangements to several of the Gruuthuse-melodies. We learned that the results confirm the modal-structure of the melodies, as in the central European repertoire. In the Mönch and Wolkenstein songs the text-phrases fit properly into the modal framework of the melodies. In the Gruuthuse-repertoire it is also possible to adhere to the modal framework as a starting point to connect the text-phrases and the melody.

As a result the Gruuthuse-songs show a characteristic idiom, with – not only in the texts but in the melodies as well – some German flavor.